

## Some guidelines for Research Methods I/II writing

Academic writing is formal writing – many people believe that means using an excessive number of words and writing dryly, but this belief is not accurate (at least in economics). Below are some guidelines for writing.

### Formatting

1. Please make sure your name is on the first page.
2. Please number your pages. Page numbers are helpful so that we can reference parts of the paper when discussing it with you.
3. Include an abstract of between 100-200 words on the first page. The abstract should be a brief statement of the research question, why it is important, and summarize the findings.
4. Put all tables and figures on a separate page at the end of the paper. We encourage you to write full descriptions of the tables and figures in their captions. Do **\*NOT\*** simply copy a table from Stata or whatever software you are using. When creating a table, be sure to change your “software variable names” into actual words. For example, if you have been using “abc\_XYZ” to mean “Unemployment rate,” then write (or type) “Unemployment rate” as the variable name.
5. There is no perfect format for creating tables, as the structure of the table likely depends on what information you are conveying. A table of summary statistics will look different than a table that has the results of a few different regression models. While reading papers for your literature review, note what papers have easily understandable tables and mimic that style when appropriate.
6. Make sure not have section headings at the bottom of a page with no non-heading text after them.

### Writing

1. Proofread your paper. Spellcheck does not catch everything. Better yet, have someone who likes you but is not an economist read your paper. Ask that person if the paper (or at least the reason for the paper) seems clear to him or her, and, if they respond negatively, reconsider how you have written the paper.
2. Do not use contractions. The writing is formal.
3. Be concise. Here is an example of what I mean: “Table 2 shows OLS estimates for ...” or “Table 2 provides summary statistics ...” Those statements are very clear and they are concise. Here is an example you should avoid: “When looking at Table 2, we see that ...” Look at how much longer the beginning of that sentence is than “Table 2 shows ...,” which gets to the point much quicker. Similarly, “A paper by Smith in 1982” is a long way of writing “Smith (1982)” and conveys the same basic information.
4. Use the present tense throughout the paper, unless it is absolutely necessary to use the past tense. Even when referring to prior literature, use the present tense. See the example in the first numbered point under references.

## Organization

1. Your paper should start with an introduction. The introduction should contain the research question, and the research question should be made clear within the first two paragraphs.
2. Consider the organization of your references when writing a literature review. Oftentimes students simply discuss one paper, then another, then a third, etc. without considering how those papers are linked. I would suggest grouping the papers by topic (as an example you may have some theoretical literature and some empirical literature) and then within each topic discussing the papers chronologically because typically newer papers build off of older ones. This process is not always applicable, but it might help you as you begin writing a literature review. The goal of the literature review should be to show what has been done, but more importantly, to provide evidence that your research question has not been answered, or at least not answered in a satisfactory way.
3. If you had a theoretical model it would typically go in the third section. If you had hypotheses that are generated from someone else's theoretical model, then they would go here.
4. Next you should discuss the data. In addition to describing the data sources and the variables, you should also provide summary statistics and graphs/figures of important relationships between variables.
5. You should present your empirical model(s) next. Essentially you are informing the reader of how you plan to analyze the data.
6. After you describe the data and empirical approach you are using, you should discuss your results. This discussion should include more than just statistical significance – what is the economic importance of your findings.
7. Finally, you conclude. Summarize your results and explain what might be lacking in your own study. Make some suggestions on how the study could be extended by future researchers.

## References

1. When referring to a paper, use a basic "Author(s) (year)" style to reference publications. Opinions differ on this point, but we feel "Smith (1982)" conveys much more information than "Smith [16]" because from the content we might know which Smith paper you are discussing if you include the year. Also, you can use "Smith (1982)" as the noun in your sentence – this point is a variation of "be concise". "Smith (1982) finds that ... " is much more direct than "In his 1982 paper, Smith finds ... " Note that I used the present tense (Smith finds) in the beginning of that sentence, rather than the past tense (Smith found).
2. Sometimes you will see a paragraph that mentions a paper at the beginning, and then at the end of each sentence in the paragraph there is a reference to the same paper (Zillante, 2017). If you are talking about the same paper throughout the paragraph, there is no need to put a reference at the end of each sentence in the paragraph (Zillante, 2017). It simply distracts us from reading (Zillante, 2017).
3. We do \*NOT\* need the title of an article in the text of your paper. We also do \*NOT\* need first names of authors in the text. Save the title of the article and the authors' first names for the list of references at the end of the paper.

4. Make sure to use a consistent reference style throughout the list of references. Alphabetize the list of references.

Overall, we suggest adopting the style of a specific academic journal and using that style (section headings, tables/figures, references) for all of your papers. Three journals that have a style we like are the *Journal of Finance*, the *Journal of Political Economy*, and the *Southern Economic Journal*.